



What is Child Well-being?: Does It Matter How We Measure It?

Presented to the National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference,
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What is Child Well-Being?

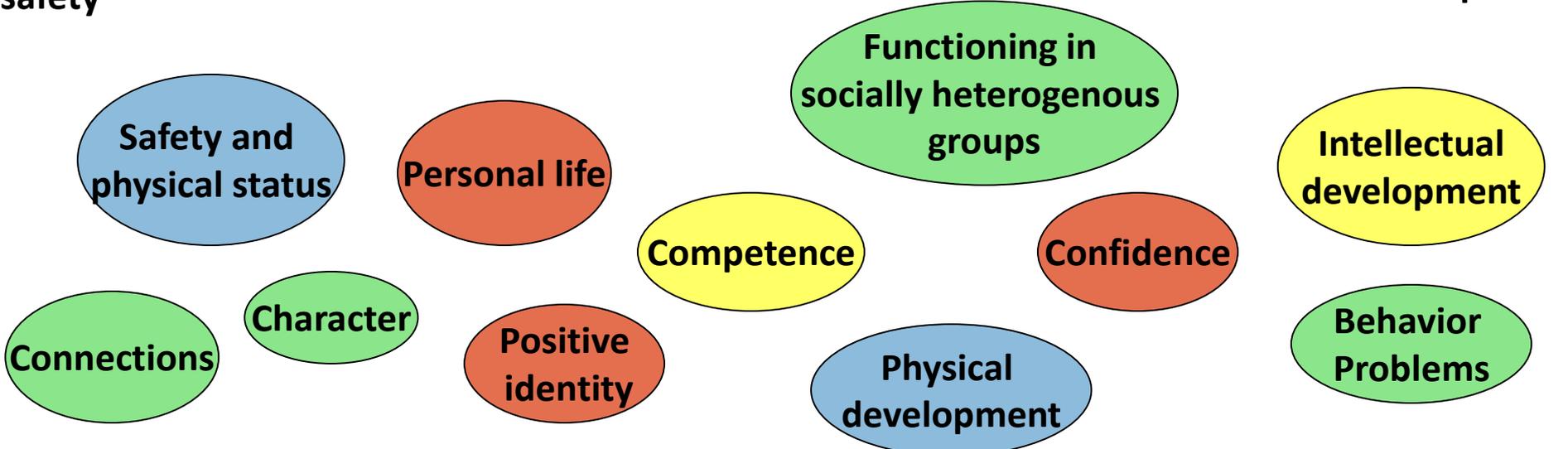


Child well-being represents the whole child:

- Physical health, development, and safety
- Psychological and emotional development
- Social development and behavior
- Cognitive development and educational achievement

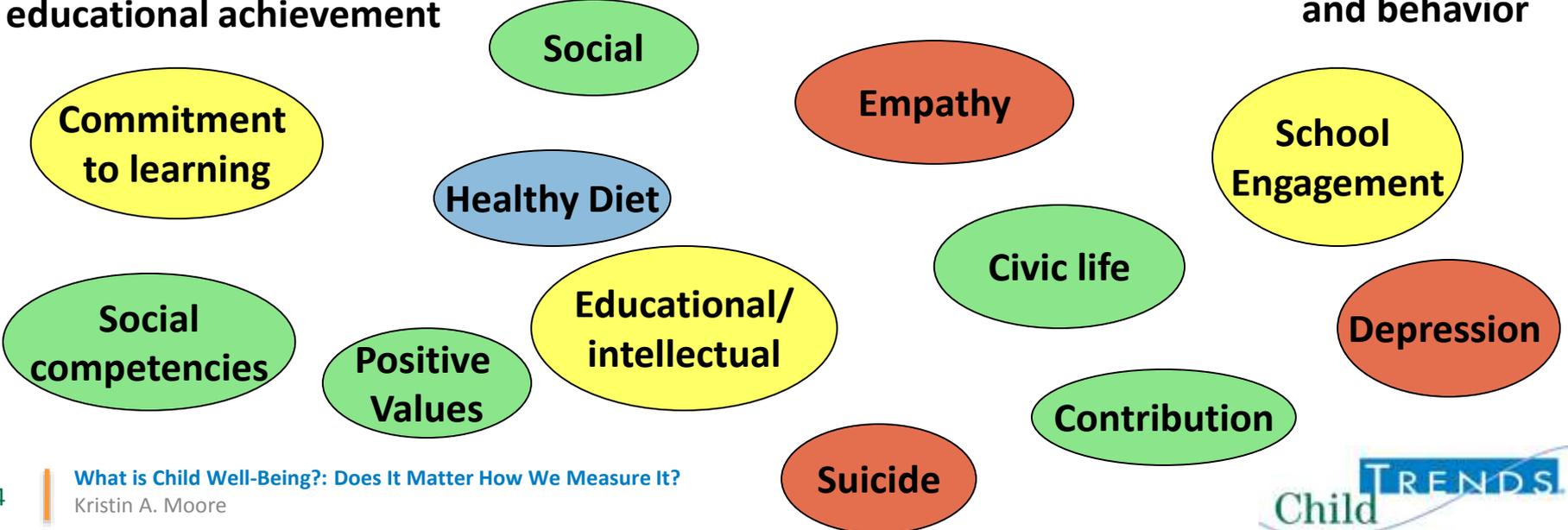
Physical health, development and safety

Psychological/emotional development



Cognitive development and educational achievement

Social development and behavior

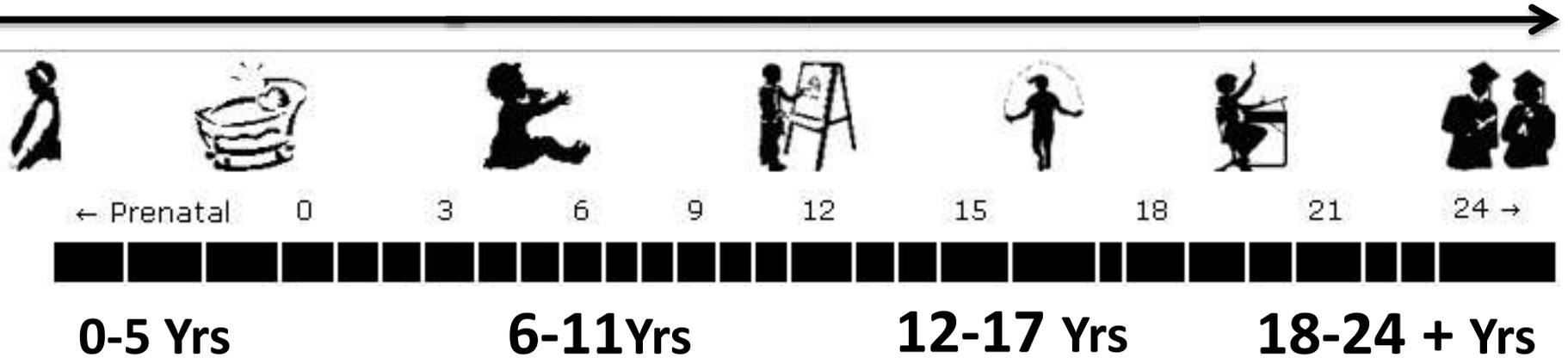


Child well-being includes well-being and well-becoming

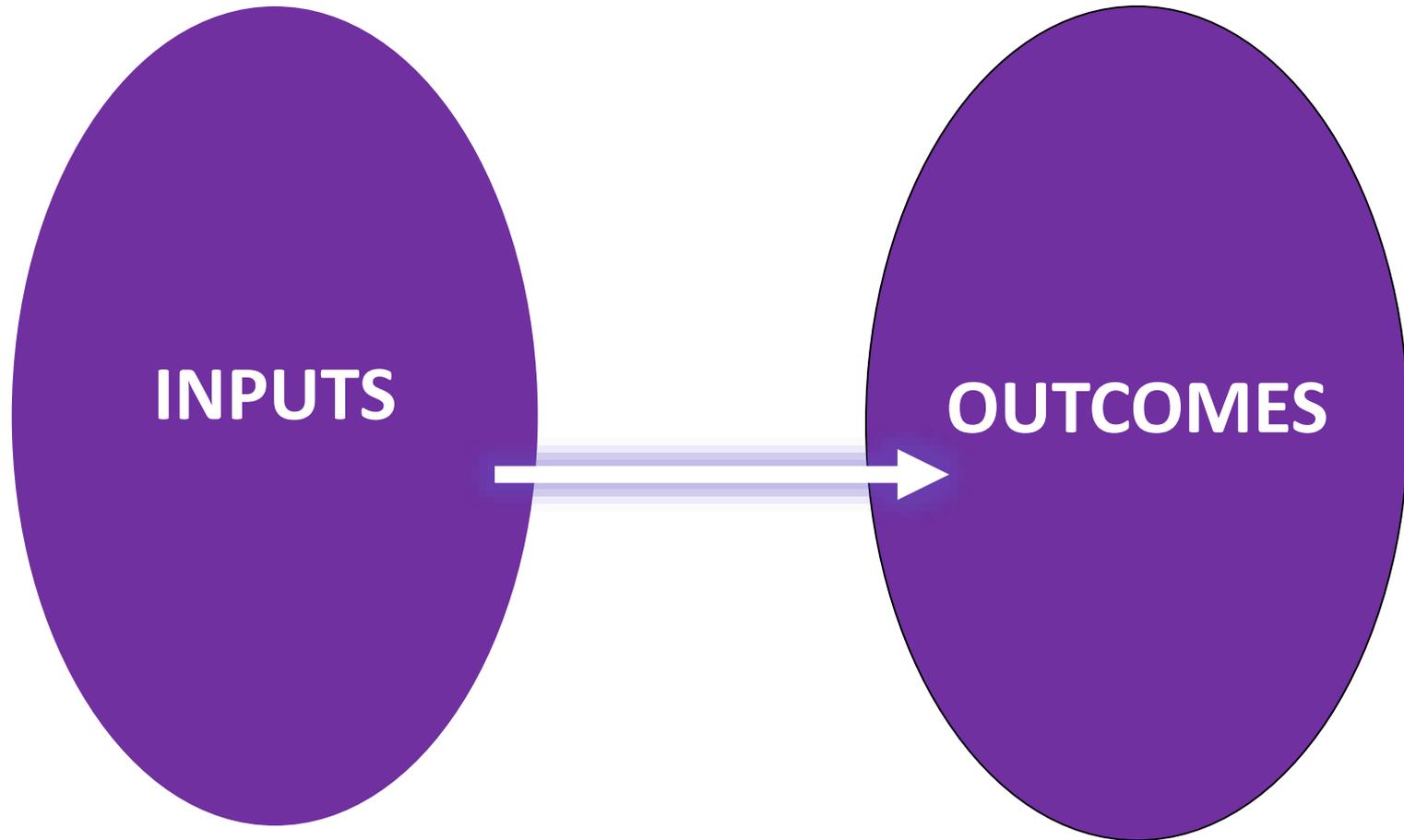


Child well-being needs to be assessed across ages

(An outcome at one stage of childhood is generally an input at the next stage of development.)



Child well-being is an outcome, not an input



Inputs

Poverty

Health Coverage

Schools

Food Security

After-school programs



Child Outcomes

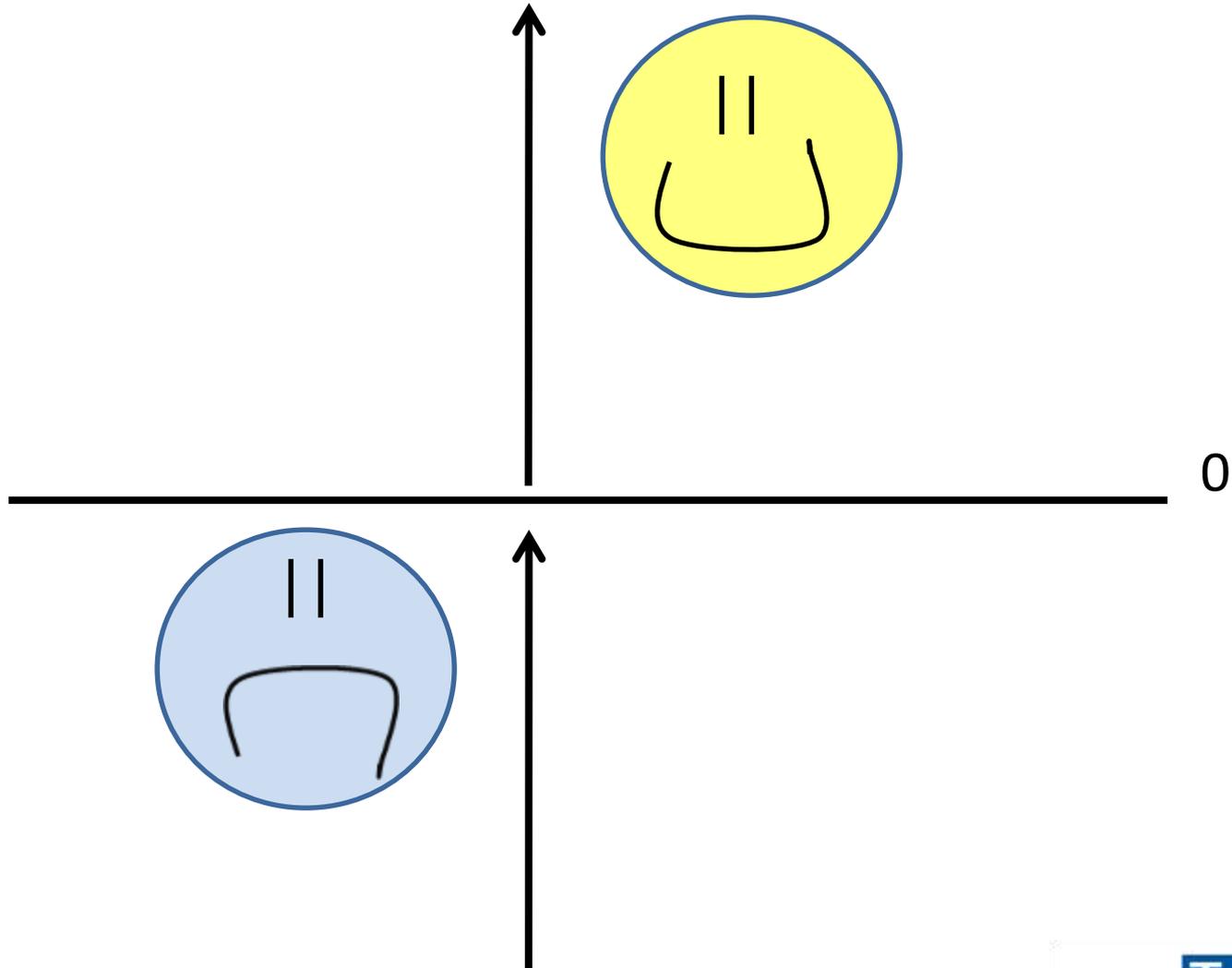
Education

Health

Behavior

Socio-emotional

Child well-being is positive as well as negative



What does the public hear about kids?

Disability

Mortality

Morbidity

Crime

Dropouts

VIOLENCE

Teen Pregnancy

Illicit Drug Use

Cigarette Use

Bad outcomes do matter

Negative development is important
(bad is stronger than good)



But, good outcomes matter too



7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

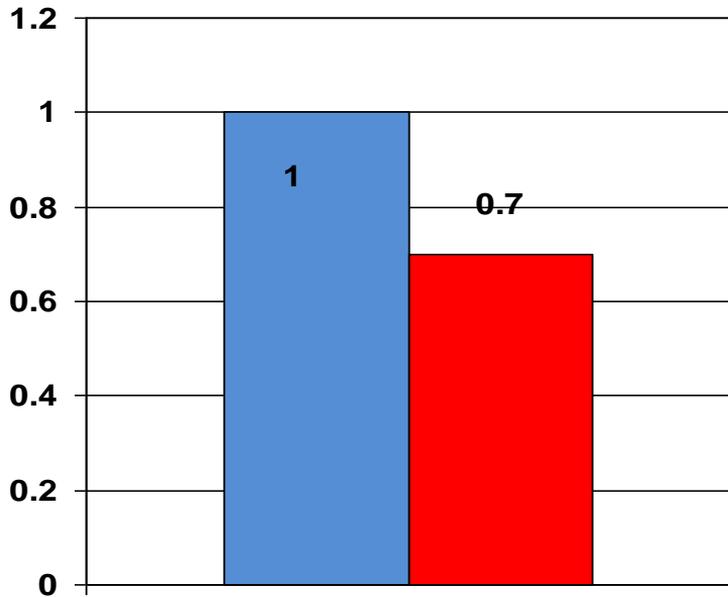
- **The Declaration of Independence**

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

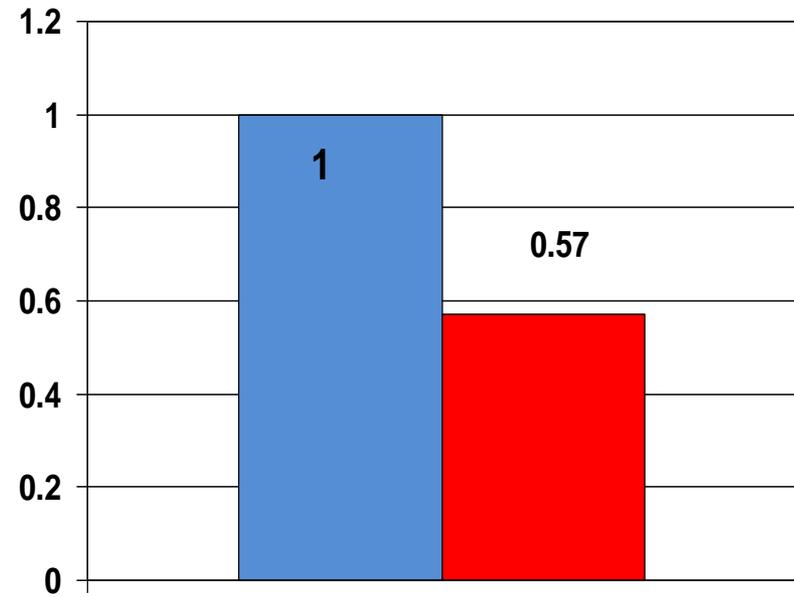
7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- **It's good science**

Positive indicators, such as parent/adolescent relationships, are related to better child development



Becoming Sexually Active



Be Behind in School

- Not a Positive Relationship w/Mother
- Has a Positive Relationship w/Mother

7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- Good science
- **Necessary to fully describe children and youth**

Physical Health, Development, and Safety

Positive

Exercise

Healthy eating habits

Safety habits (seat belt, helmet)

Negative

Illness

Obesity

Injury



Psychological & Emotional Development

Positive

Life Satisfaction

Hope

Empathy



Negative

Depression

Low Self-Esteem

Suicidal Thoughts



Social Development & Behavior

Positive

Civic engagement

Volunteering

Environmental Stewardship

Negative

Drinking

Drug use

Gang Involvement



Cognitive Development & Educational Achievement

Positive

Educational engagement
Curiosity
Critical thinking



Negative

Dropout
Truancy
Expulsion



Relationships

Positive

Positive relationship with parents

Positive sibling relationships

Positive friendships



Negative

Conflict

Violence

Arguments



7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- Good science
- Necessary to fully describe children and youth
- **Can be measured well**

Criticism that they are ‘soft’, ‘squishy’ or ‘gluey’ is not warranted

Soft



Squishy



Gluey



Flourishing Families Project

- Funded by the John Templeton Foundation
- Developed and tested items
- Conducted a national survey
- Did psychometric analyses

Example of Constructs: Flourishing Children Constructs

Relationship Skills

- **Empathy**
- **Social Competence**

Flourishing in Relationships

- **Positive relationships with parents**
- **Positive friendships with peers**

Flourishing in School and Work

- **Diligence & Reliability**
- **Educational Engagement**
- **Initiative Taking**
- **Thrift**
- **Trustworthiness & Integrity**

Helping Others to Flourish

- **Altruism**
- **Generosity**

Environmental Stewardship

- **Environmental Stewardship**

Personal Flourishing

- **Forgiveness**
- **Goal Orientation**
- **Gratitude**
- **Hope**
- **Life satisfaction**
- **Purpose**
- **Spirituality**

Positive indicators can be measured well

- Strengths are more prevalent than deficits, so specificity in measurement is needed
- Positive bias in reporting of positive behaviors, which requires detailed response categories
- Use concrete items
- In scales, combine negative with positive items
- Develop items that work across subgroups

Overview of psychometric analyses

- Examined distributions of each item
- Assessed Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency)
- Conducted confirmatory factor analyses
 - Adolescents
 - Parents
 - Jointly
 - Criteria: CFI ($>.95$) TLI ($>.95$) RMSEA ($<.085$)
- Examined concurrent validity



Concurrent Validity

- **Social behavior: Fighting**
 - During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight?
- **Health behavior: Smoking**
 - During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?
- **Emotional outcome: Depressive Symptoms**
 - During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?
- **Cognitive outcome: Grades (parent report)**
 - Now I would like to ask you about [his/her] grades during the LAST school year. Overall, across all subjects ([he/she] takes at school), did [he/she] get . . . Mostly A's; Mostly B's; Mostly C's; Mostly D's and lower; [His/her] school does not give these grades
- **Examined in multivariate analyses**

Constructs

Relationship Skills

- Empathy
- **Social Competence**

Flourishing in Relationships

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Flourishing in School and Work

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- Environmental Stewardship

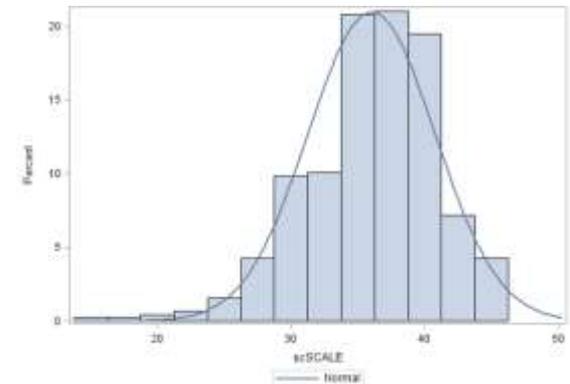
Personal Flourishing

- Forgiveness
- Goal Orientation
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Life satisfaction
- Purpose
- Spirituality

Social Competence (Adolescent)

Please indicate how much these statements describe you. (Not at all like me-Exactly like me)	Please indicate how often this happens. How often... (None of the time-All of the time)
I avoid making other kids look bad.	do you get along well with people of different races, cultures, and religions?
If two of my friends are fighting, I find a way to work things out.	do you listen to other students' ideas?
When I work in school groups, I do my fair share.	do you control your anger when you have a disagreement with a friend?
	can you discuss a problem with a friend without making things worse?
	do you follow the rules when you are at a park, theater, or sports event?
	do you respect other points of view, even if you disagree?

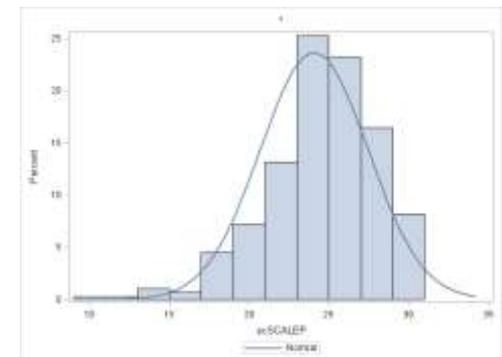
- Alpha=0.79
- CFI= 0.986
- TLI= 0.981
- RMSEA= 0.042



Social Competence (Parent)

Please indicate how much these statements describe your child. (Not at all like my child-Exactly like my child)	How often... (None of the time-All of the time)
My child avoids making other kids look bad.	does your child get along well with people of different races, cultures, and religions?
If two of my child's friends are fighting, my child finds a way to work things out.	does your child follow the rules at a park, theater, or sports event?
When my child works in groups, he/she does his/her fair share.	does your child respect other people's point of view, even if he/she disagrees?

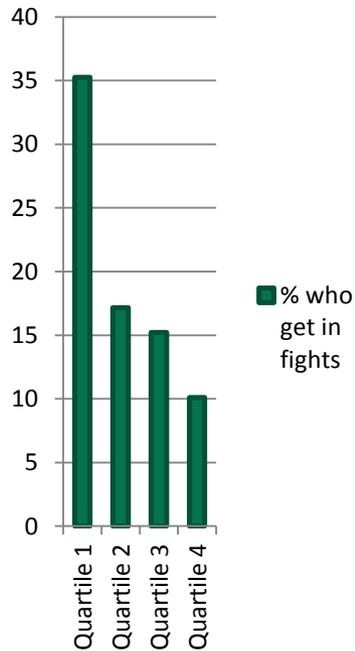
- Alpha=0.62
- CFI= 0.983
- TLI=0.971
- RMSEA=0.040



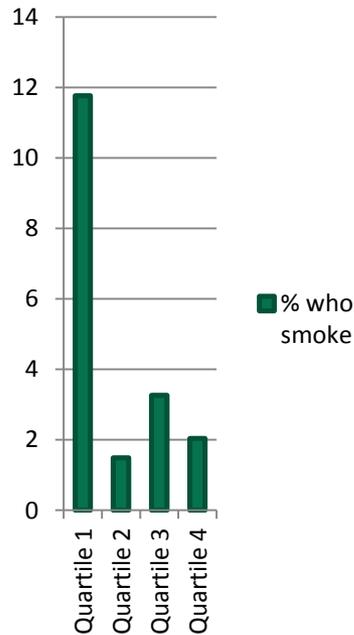
Social Competence

	Fighting	Smoking	Depression (teen report)	Grades
Social Competence	-0.14***	-0.28***	-0.10**	0.12***

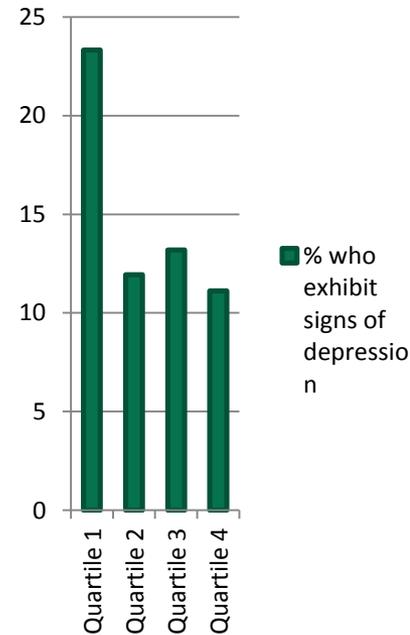
Fighting



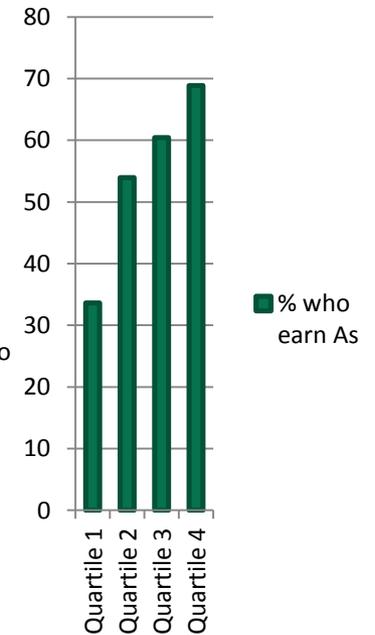
Smoking



Depression



Grades



Generosity (Adolescents)

Please indicate how much these statements describe you. (Not at all like me-Exactly like me)

I enjoy sharing my things with others.

I do nice things for others without being asked.

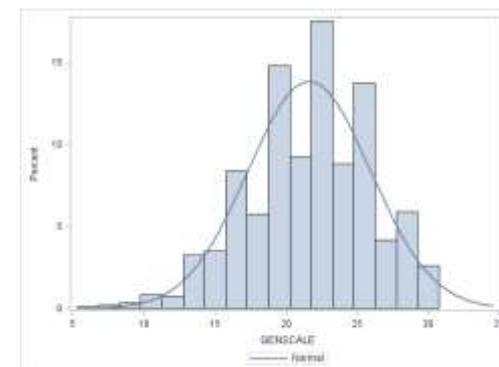
When I help out a friend, I expect something in return.

If needed, I am willing to help my family by buying fewer things for myself.

If needed, I am willing to help my family by giving up activities and trips that cost money.

If needed, I am willing to help my family by giving up my free time to help around the house.

- Alpha=0.74
- CFI=0.997
- TLI=0.994
- RMSEA=0.045



Generosity (Parents)

Please indicate how much these statements describe your child. (Not at all like my child-Exactly like my child)

My child enjoys sharing his/her things with others.

My child does nice things for others without being asked. (Strongly agree-Strongly disagree)

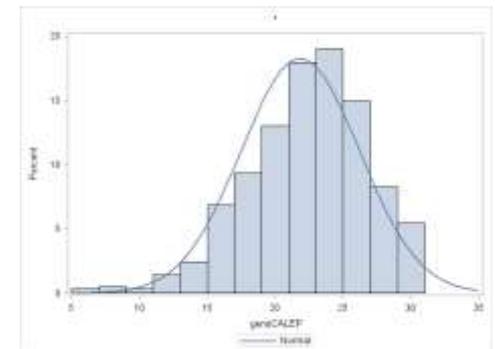
When my child helps out a friend, he/she expects something in return.

If needed, my child is willing to help our family by buying fewer things for himself/herself.

If needed, my child is willing to help our family by giving up activities and trips that cost money.

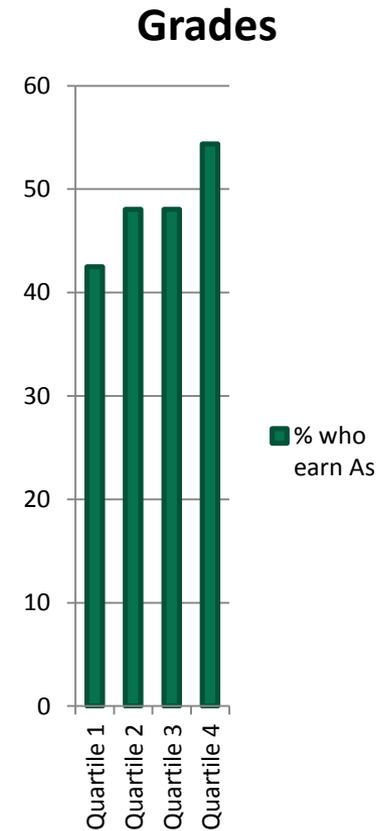
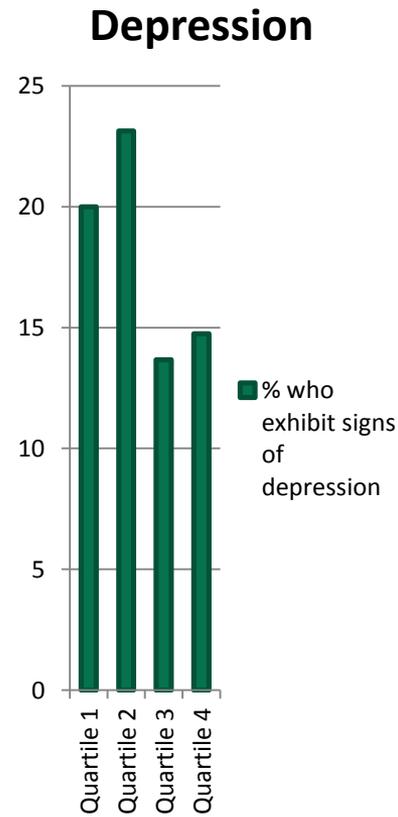
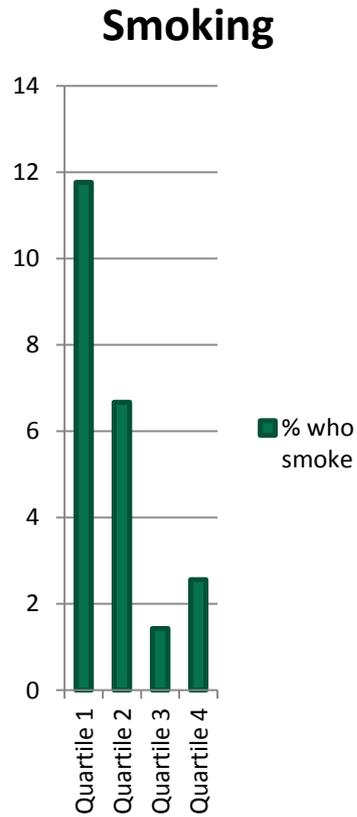
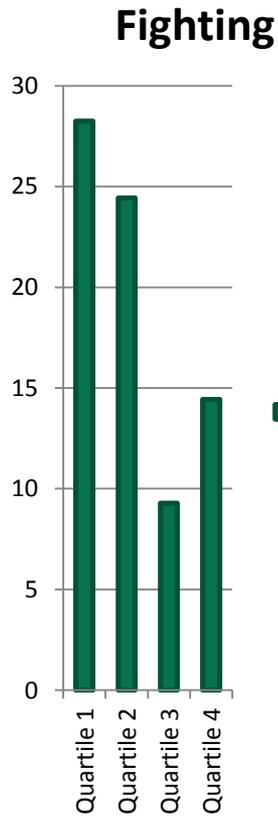
If needed, my child is willing to help our family by giving up his/her free time to help around the house.

- Alpha=0.79
- CFI=0.997
- TLI=0.994
- RMSEA=0.065



Generosity

	Fighting	Smoking	Depression (teen report)	Grades
Generosity	-0.07**	-0.17***	-0.07*	0.05***



7 Reasons Why We Need to Focus on the Positive

- The Declaration of Independence
- Good science
- Necessary to fully describe children and youth
- Can be measured well
- **Public Perceptions**

The public sees teenagers as...

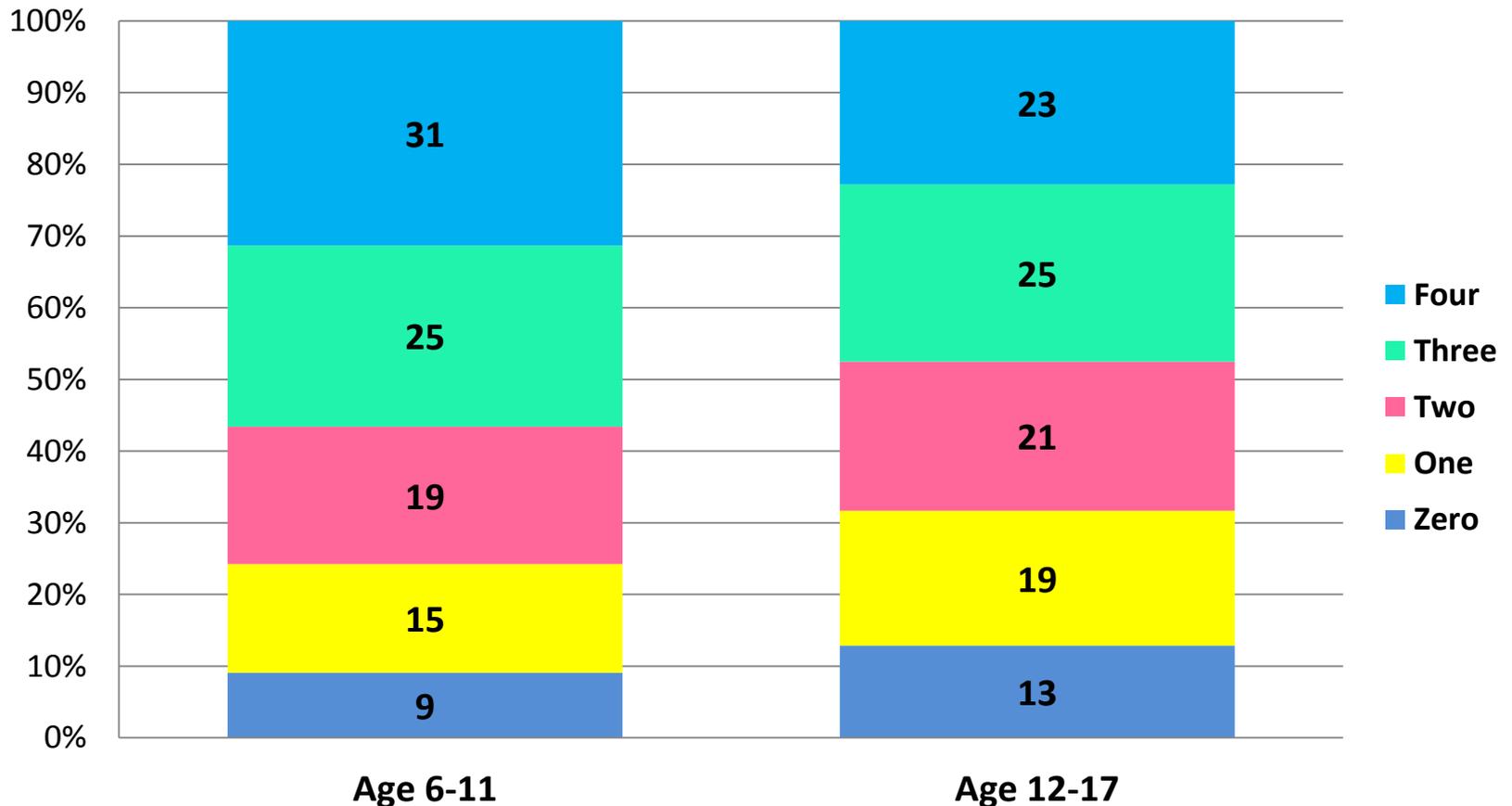
DUMB
RUDE

American families are...

FALLING APART

In fact, most children are doing well

Children Ages 6-11 & 12-17 with 0-4 domains of Positive Well-Being: Health, Education, Behavior & Socio-emotional



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- Public Perceptions
- **Kids' Perceptions**

Program recruitment and retention represent an ongoing challenge



Positive youth development

Programs that help youth build assets and work toward positive outcomes are an effective approach (more than negative didactic or shock approaches)



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- Kids' Perceptions
- **Community Perceptions**

Community perceptions

- Members of a community don't want to be told they and their children are just problems
- Also, policies and programs need to know and build on community, family and youth strengths and assets



In sum, child well-being...

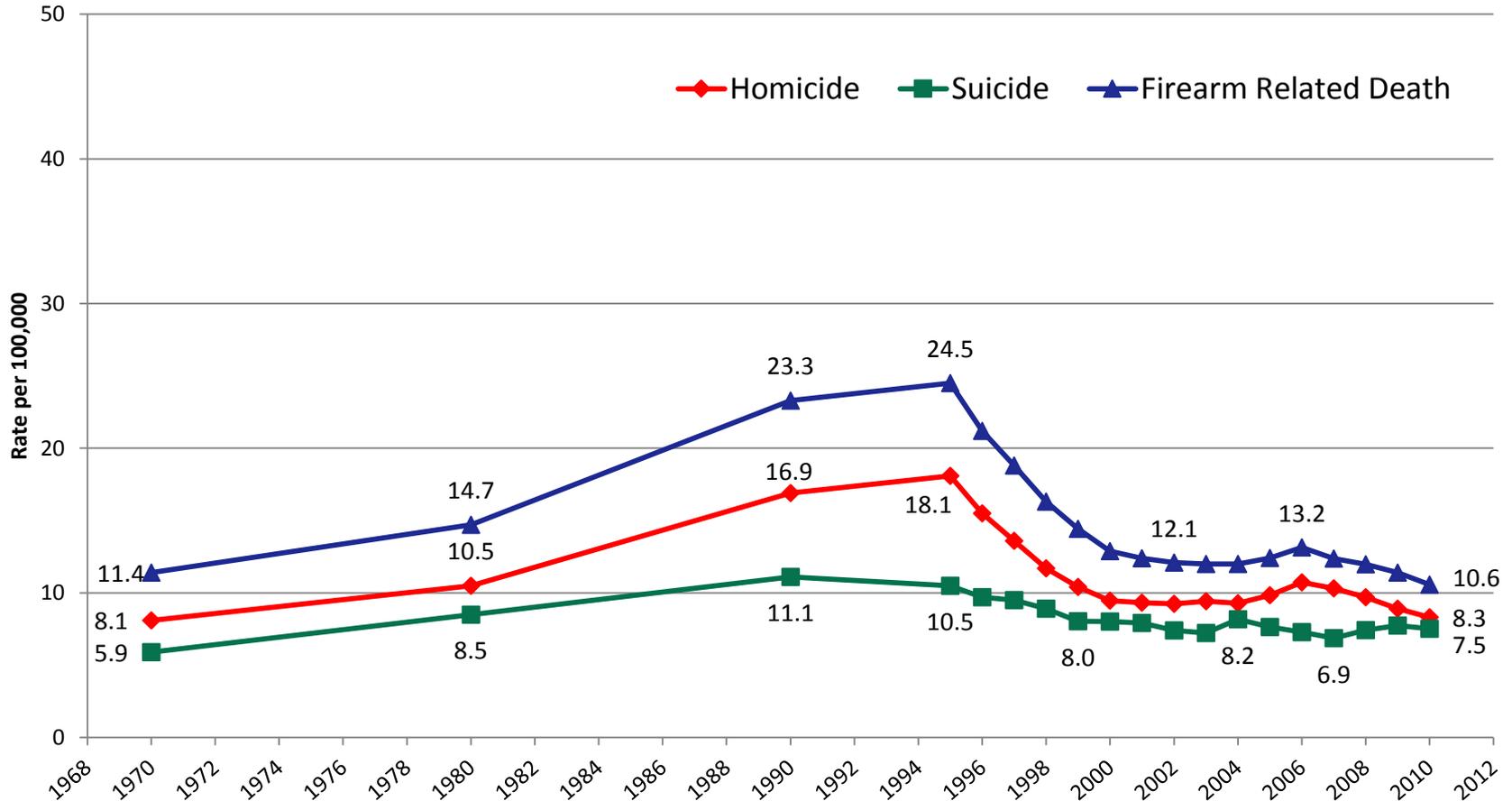
- Represents the whole child
- Includes well-being and well-becoming
- Needs to be assessed across ages
- Is an outcome and needs to be distinguished from an input
- Is positive, as well as negative
 - The Declaration of Independence
 - Good science
 - Necessary to fully describe children and youth
 - Can be measured well
 - Public Perceptions
 - Kids' Perceptions
 - Community Perceptions

5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends

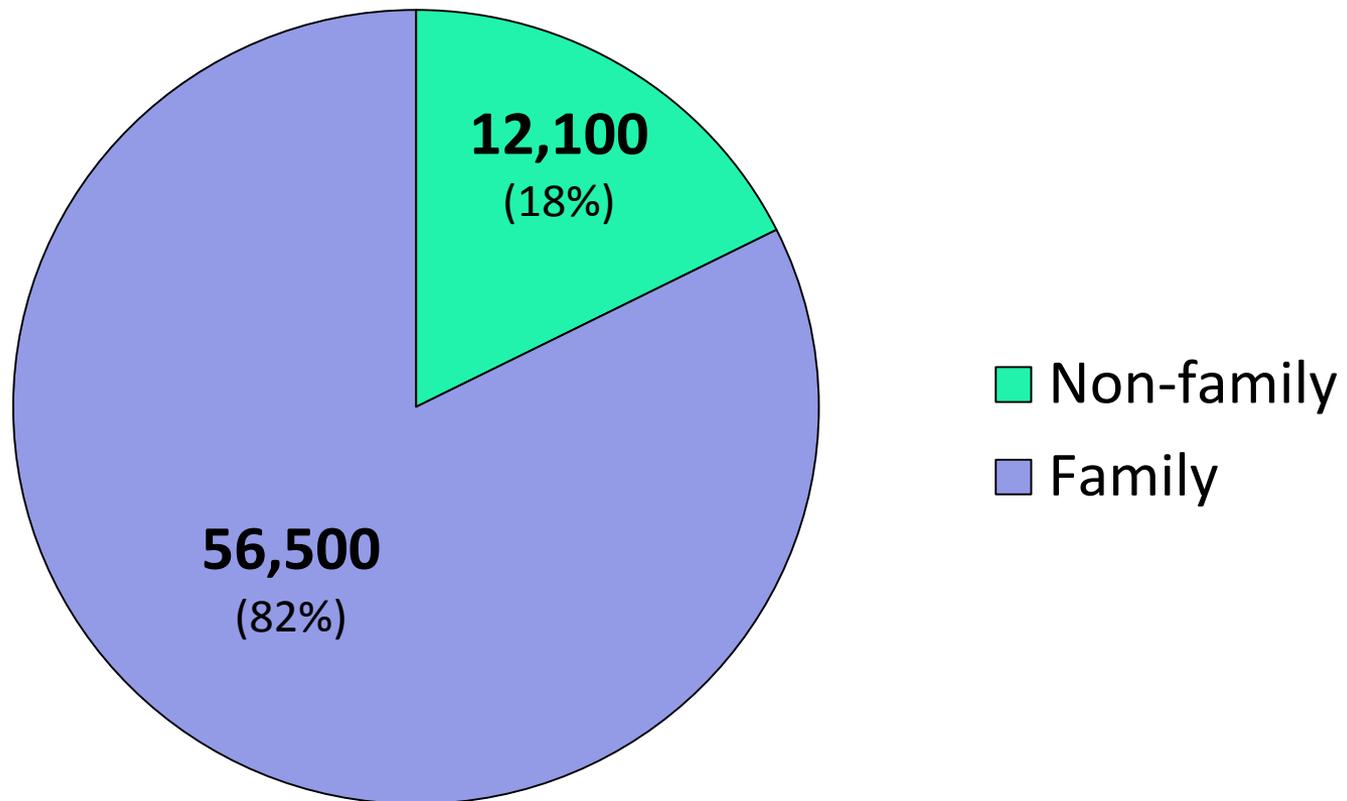
Firearm Deaths

Rates (per 100,000) for Homicide, Suicide, and Firearm-Related Deaths of Youth
Ages 15-19, Selected Years 1970-2010



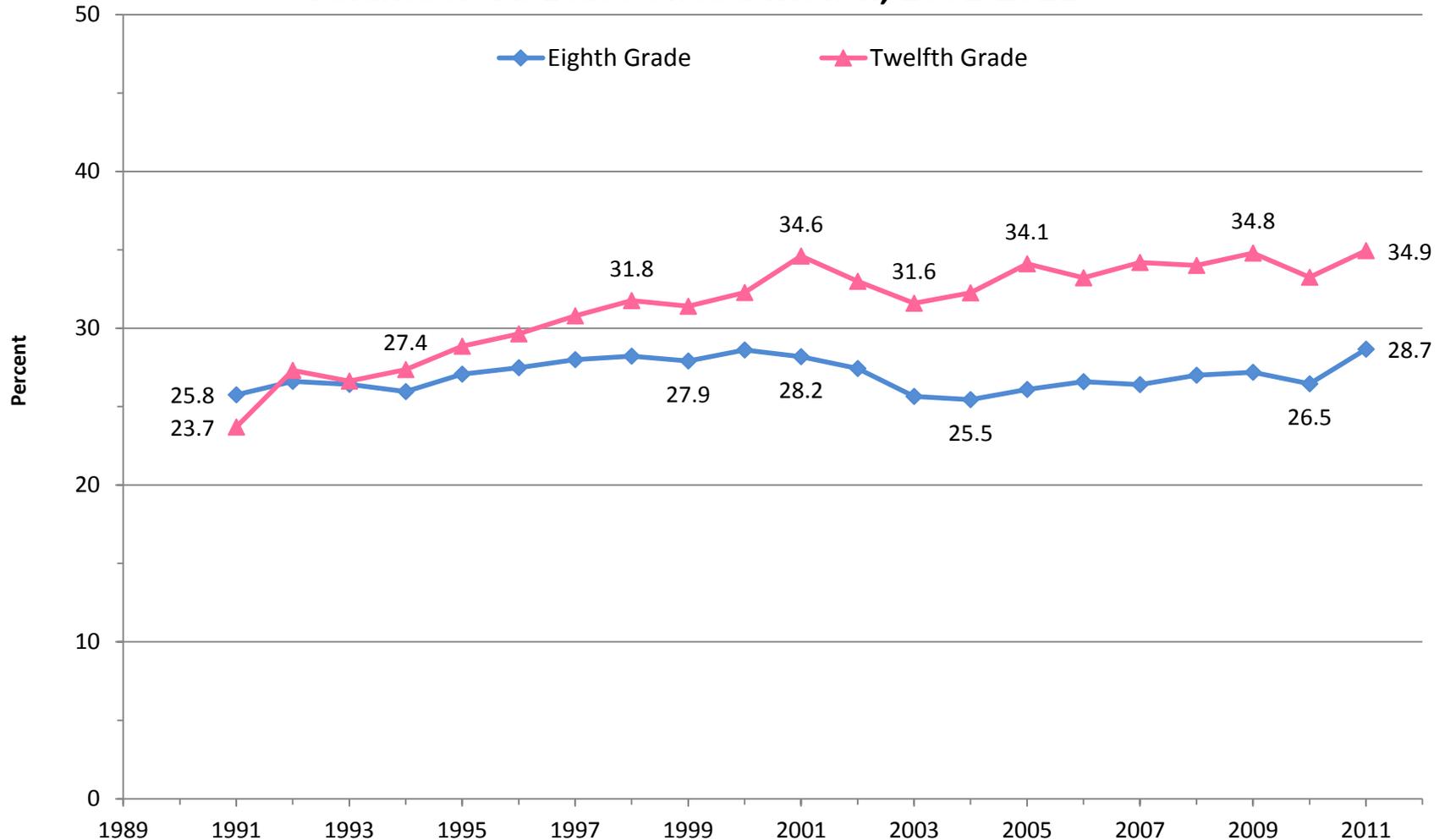
Child Abductions

Report Missing Children Ages 0-17 in 1999: Family vs. Non-Family Abductions



Volunteering

% of Students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 Who Volunteer¹ At Least Once a Month, 1991-2011

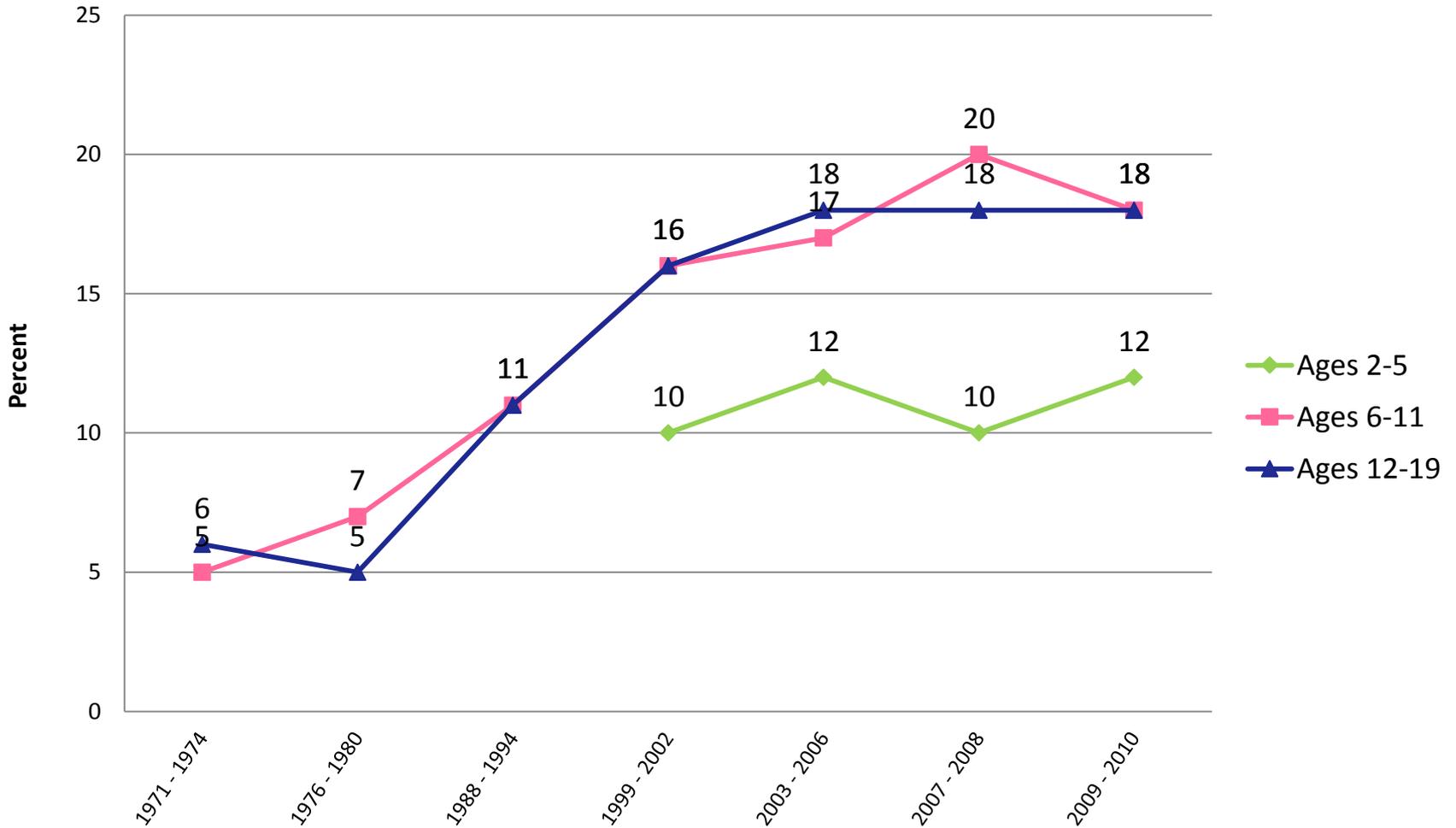


5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk

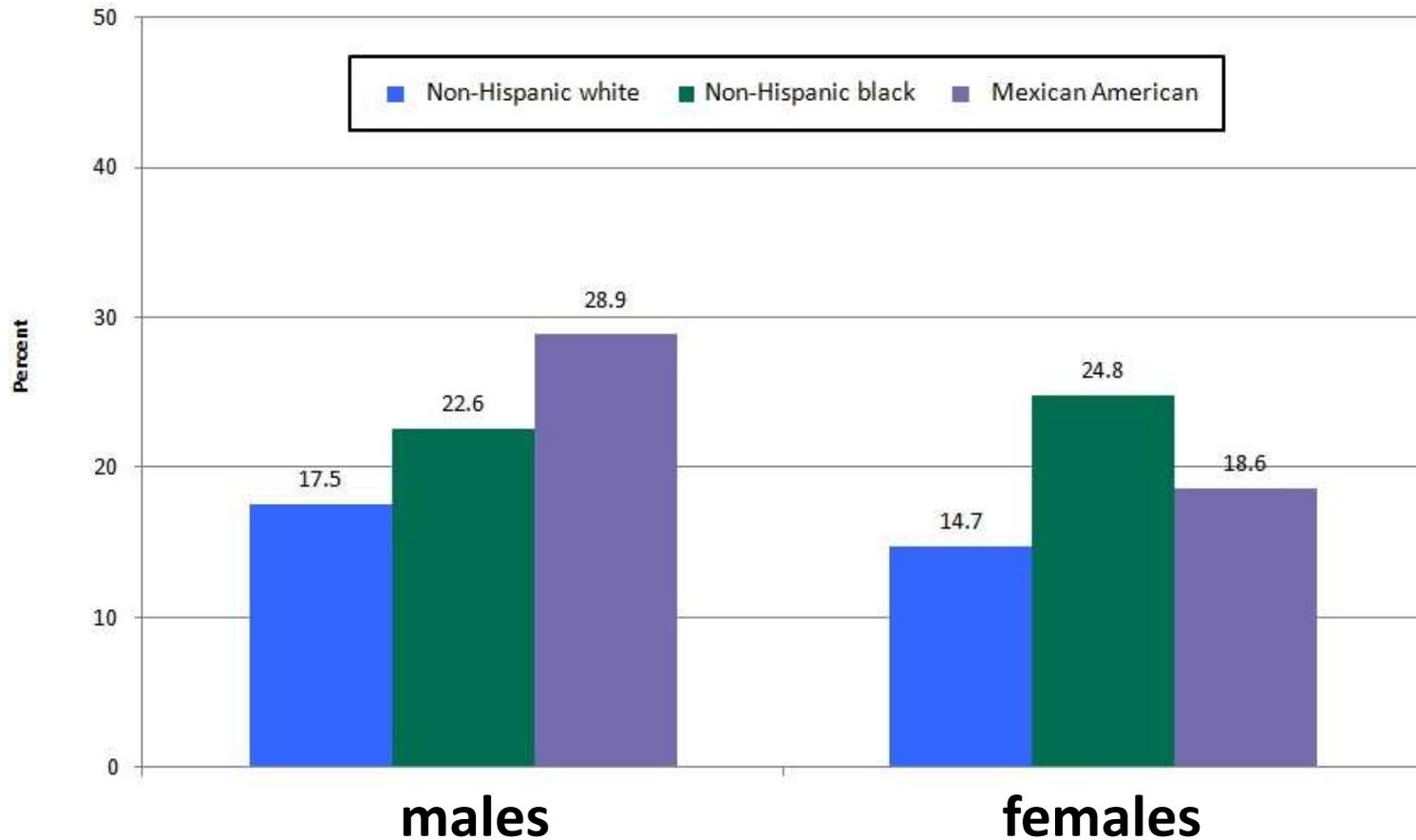
Obesity

**% of Children Ages 2 – 19 Who Are Obese, By Age:
Selected Years 1971-2010**



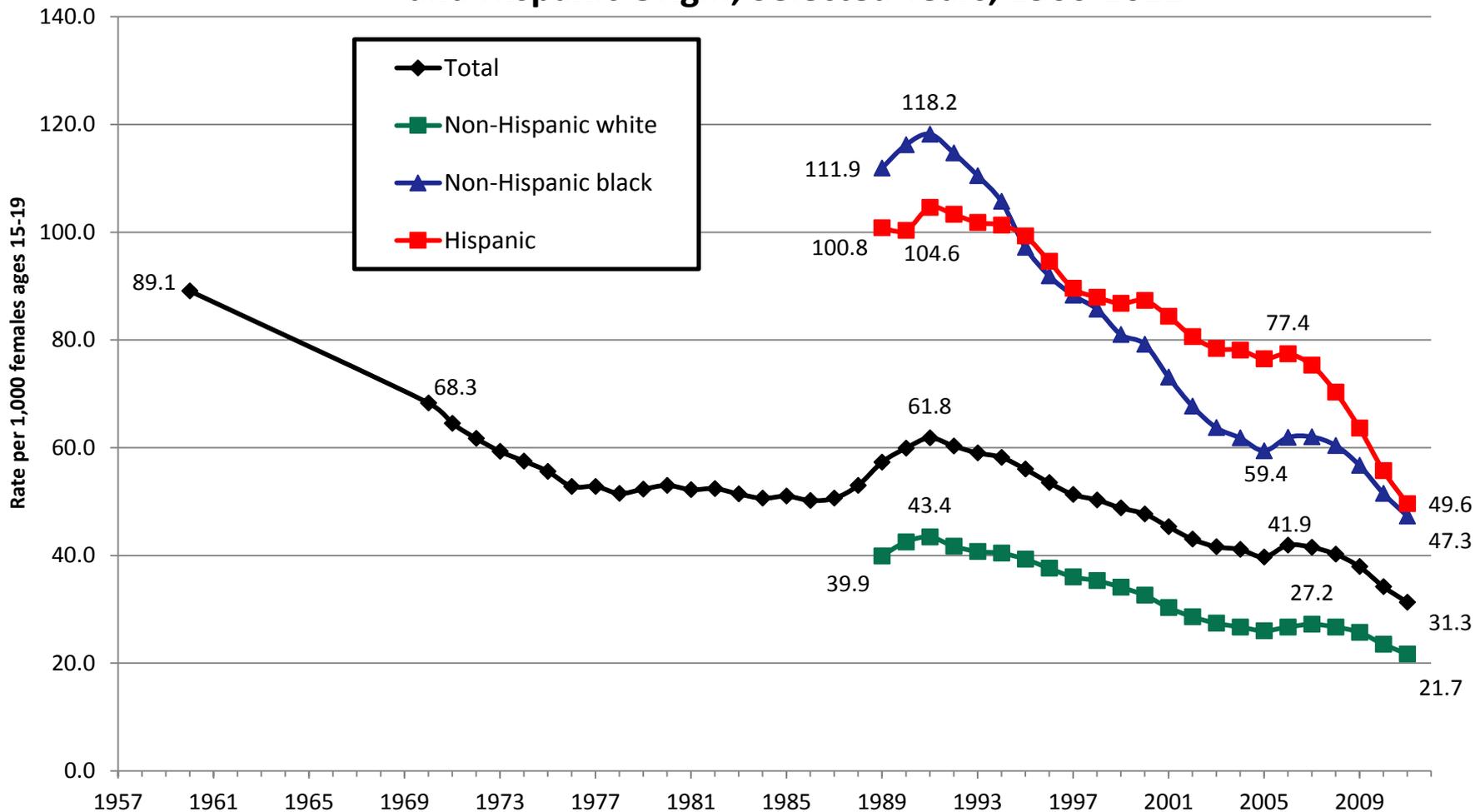
Obesity

% of Children Ages 2 – 19 Who Are Obese, By Age: Selected Years 1971 - 2010



Teen births

Birth Rates (per 1,000) for Females Ages 15 to 19, by Race and Hispanic Origin, Selected Years, 1960-2011

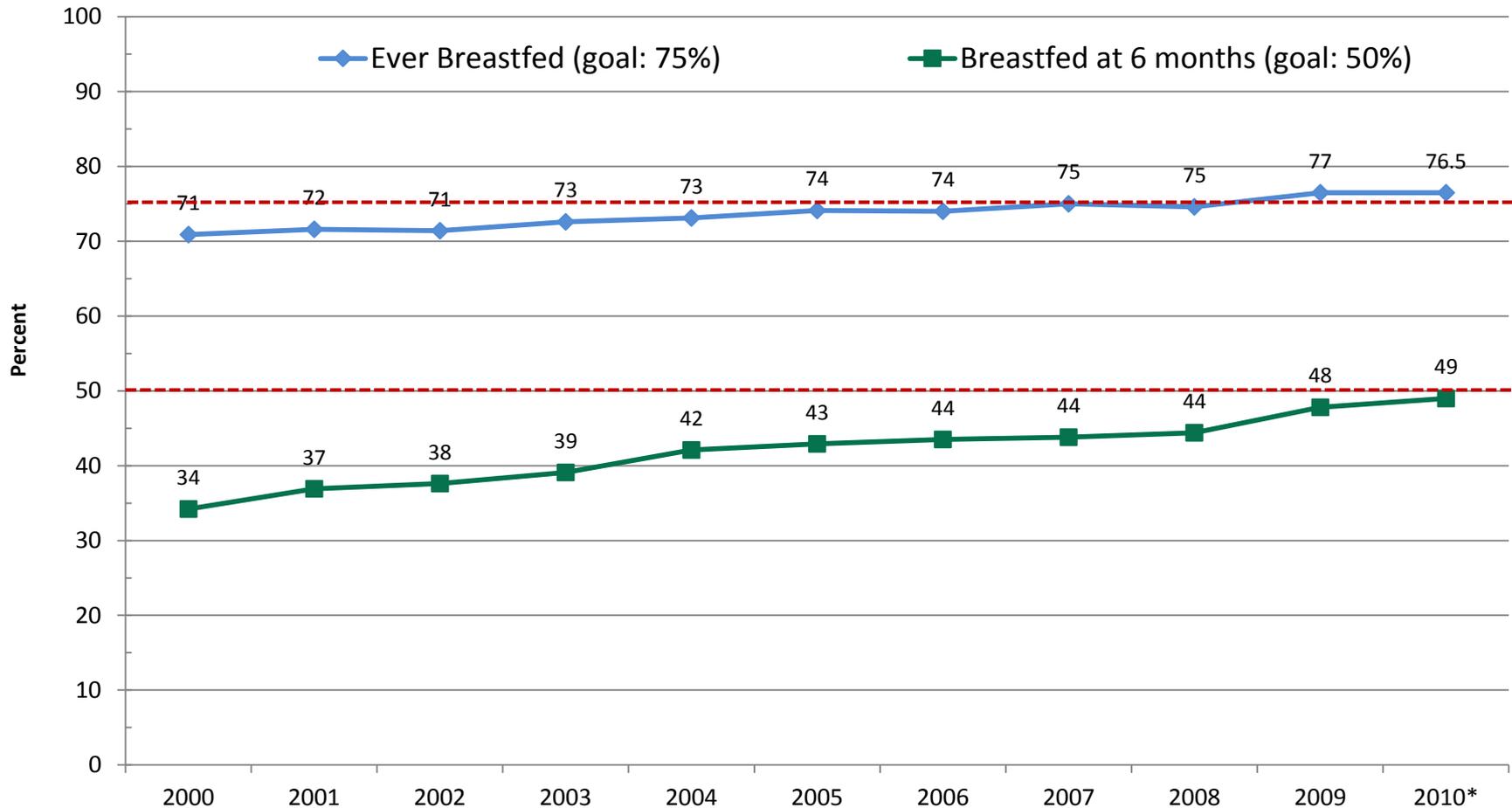


5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress

Breast feeding

Percentage of Mothers Breastfeeding, by Birth Year of Infant, 2000-2010*, and Healthy People 2010 Goals



5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

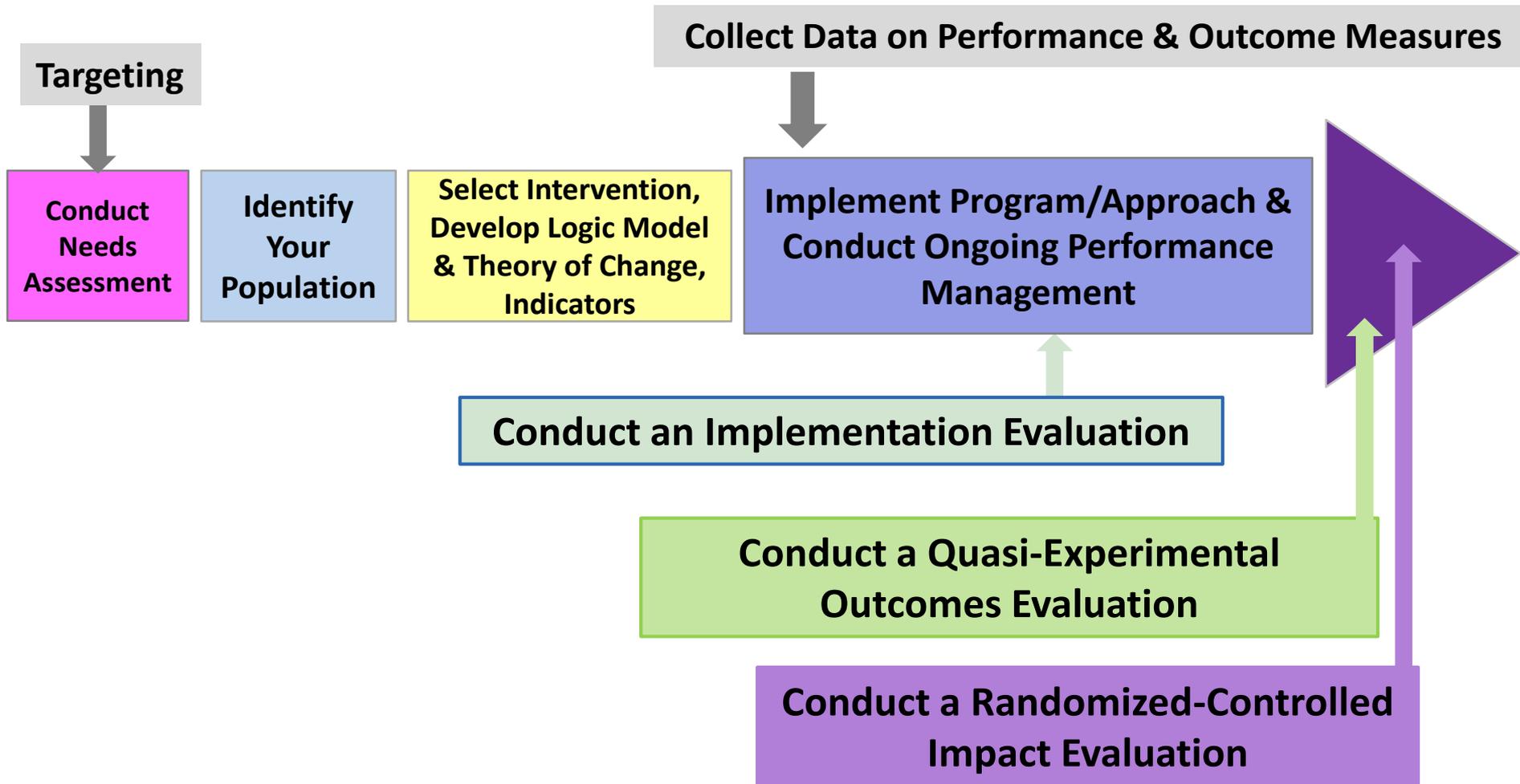
- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress
- To build the knowledge base

To build the knowledge base

Valid, reliable, and comparable measures of child well-being are needed across disciplines and methods, for:

- Indicators
- Surveys used for research
- Evaluation studies, and
- Performance management

To build the knowledge base



5 Reasons Why Rigorous, Accurate Measures of Child Well-being are Needed

- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress
- To build the knowledge base
- To inform the public, policymakers, and the press about the status of children
 - Child well-being should be a leading indicator
 - Clear, accurate, and simple measures of child well-being

Leading indicators

Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500

Gross domestic product (GDP)

Unemployment rate

Inflation rate

Housing starts

■ What should be the leading child well-being indicators?

➤ An index of child well-being?

But indices are worrisome

Indices often combine independent and dependent variables

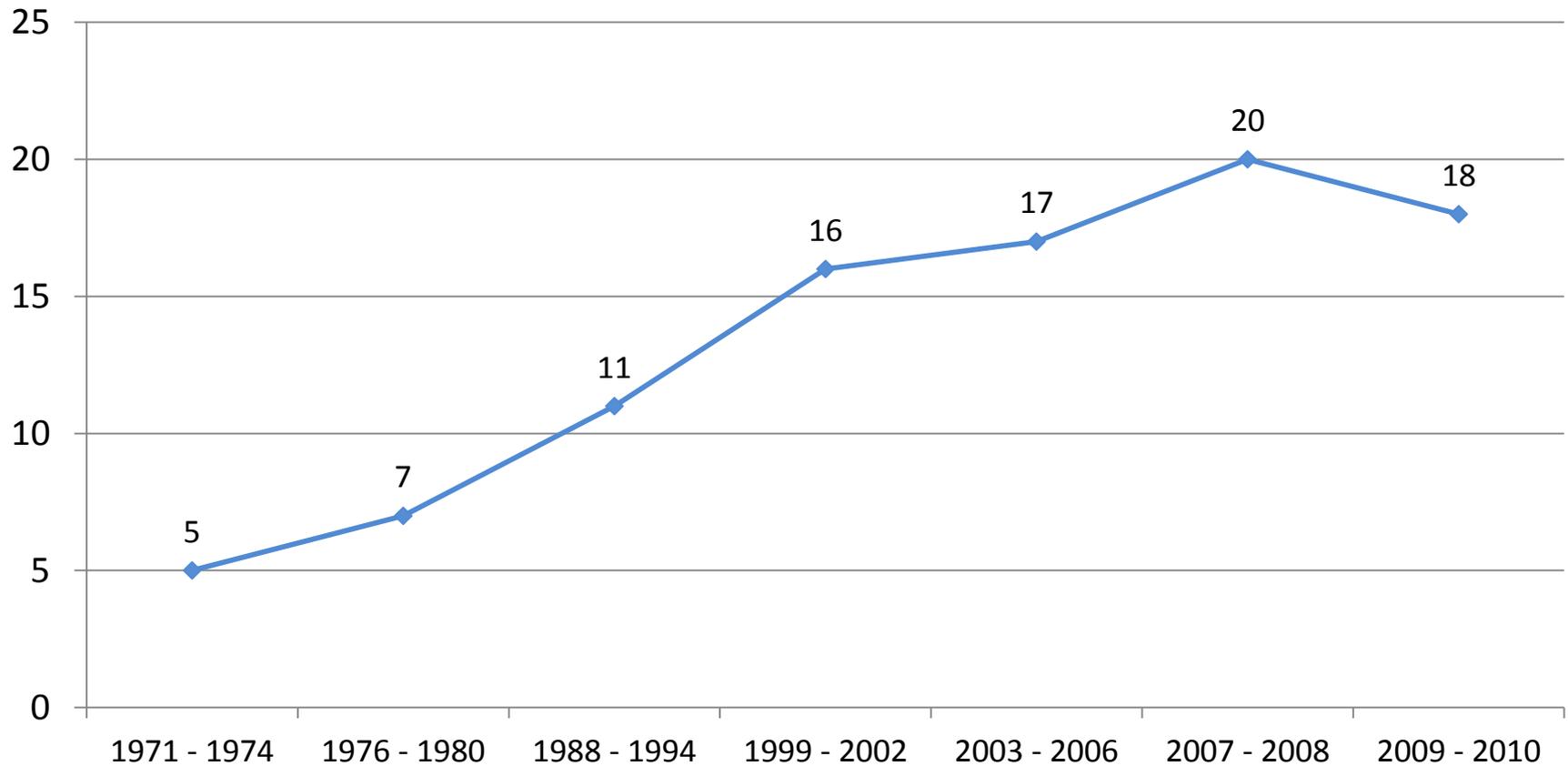
Indices often do not cover all domains, especially socio-emotional well-being

Coverage of domains is often incomplete

Indices often obscure countervailing trends

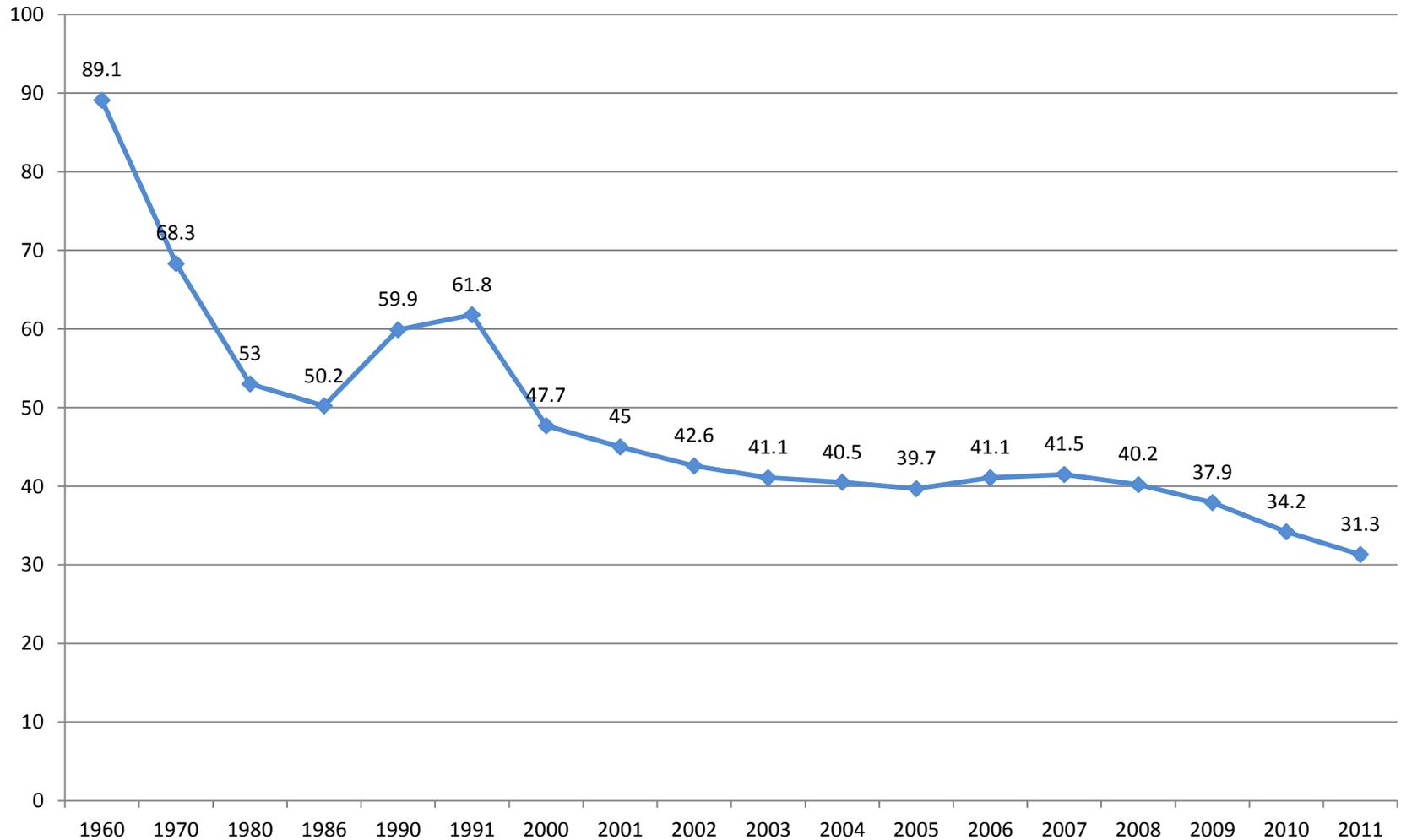
Obesity

**% of Children Ages 6 – 11 Who Are Obese:
1971 - 2010**



Teen Births

Birth Rates (per 1,000) for Females Ages 15 to 19, 1960-2011



“What gets measured gets done”

Policy makers do track trends

- They don't read academic journal articles
 - State and local data are of particular interest to policy makers

National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH)

Developed to provide indicator data for U.S. children <18 for the nation and each state

Telephone interviews with the most knowledgeable parent

Primary focus on health, but includes information on a range of child well-being constructs and on the contexts in which children grow up

Data on more than 90,000 children from 2007 (data for 2011-12 are now available)

Micro Data Indices

Children's circumstances can be described for each individual child, across multiple developmental domains, and then aggregated

Different than macro indices, which are built from data that have already been aggregated

NSCH Index Domains

- Physical health, development, and safety
- Psychological and emotional development
- Social development and behavior
- Cognitive development and educational achievement
- Overall Well-Being

Physical Health, Development, and Safety

- Health status
- Chronic health conditions
- Health risk behaviors
- Health promoting behaviors

Psychological and Emotional Development

- Internalizing problems
- Externalizing problems
- Self-esteem, self-concept
- Coping skills

Cognitive Development & Educational Achievement

- School problems
- Learning difficulties
- Cognitive development
- Achievement

Social Development & Behavior

- **Parent-child relationship**
- **Activity engagement**
- **Positive social behaviors**
- **Negative social behaviors**

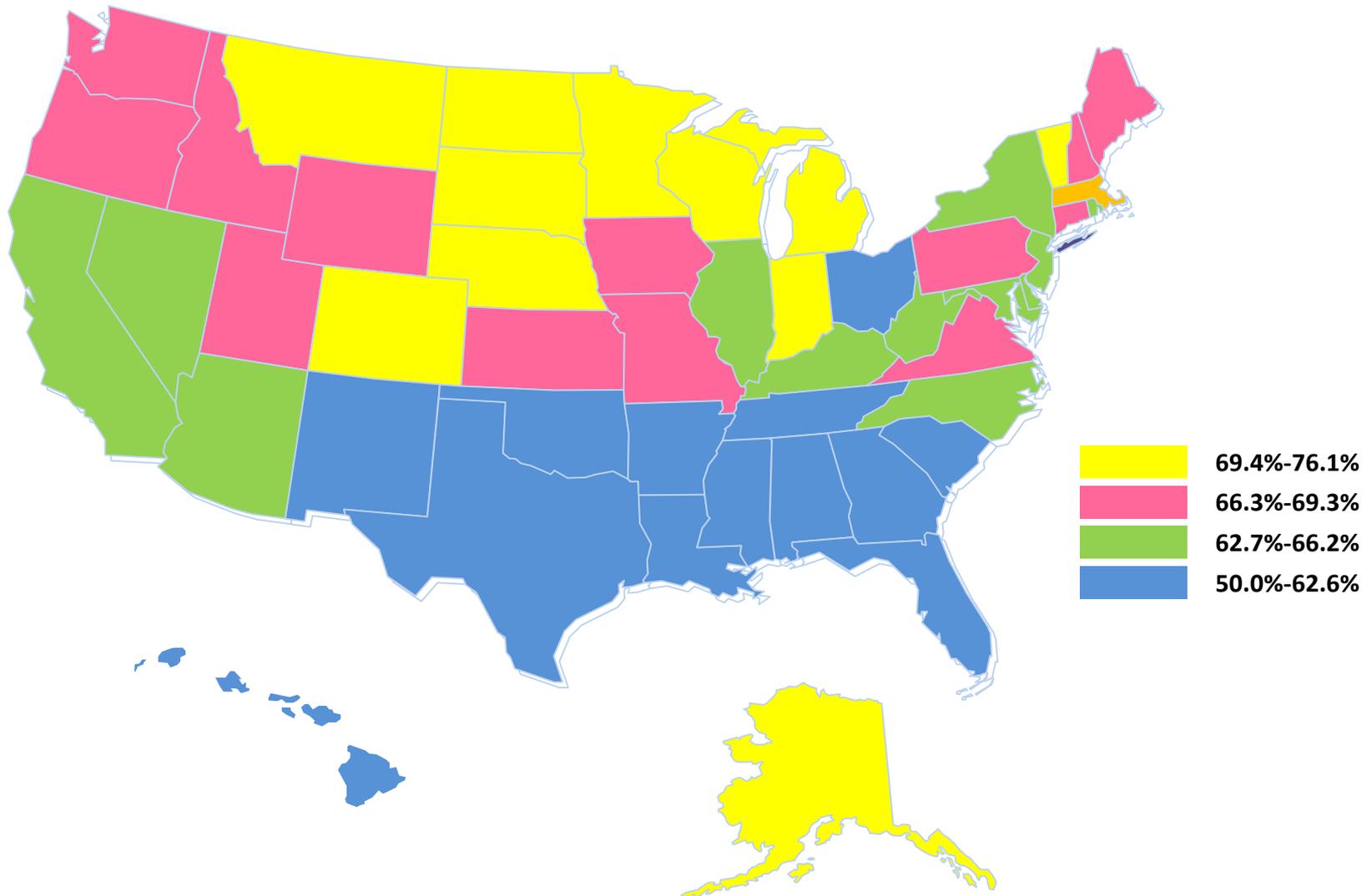
An Example: Social Development & Behavior

- **Parent-child relationship**
 - Communication
- **Activity engagement**
 - Sports; clubs; organized events
 - Volunteer, service work
- **Positive social behaviors**
 - Respect for teacher, neighbors
 - Gets along with other children
 - Tries to understand feelings
 - Tries to resolve conflicts
- **Negative social behaviors**
 - Negative behavior problems

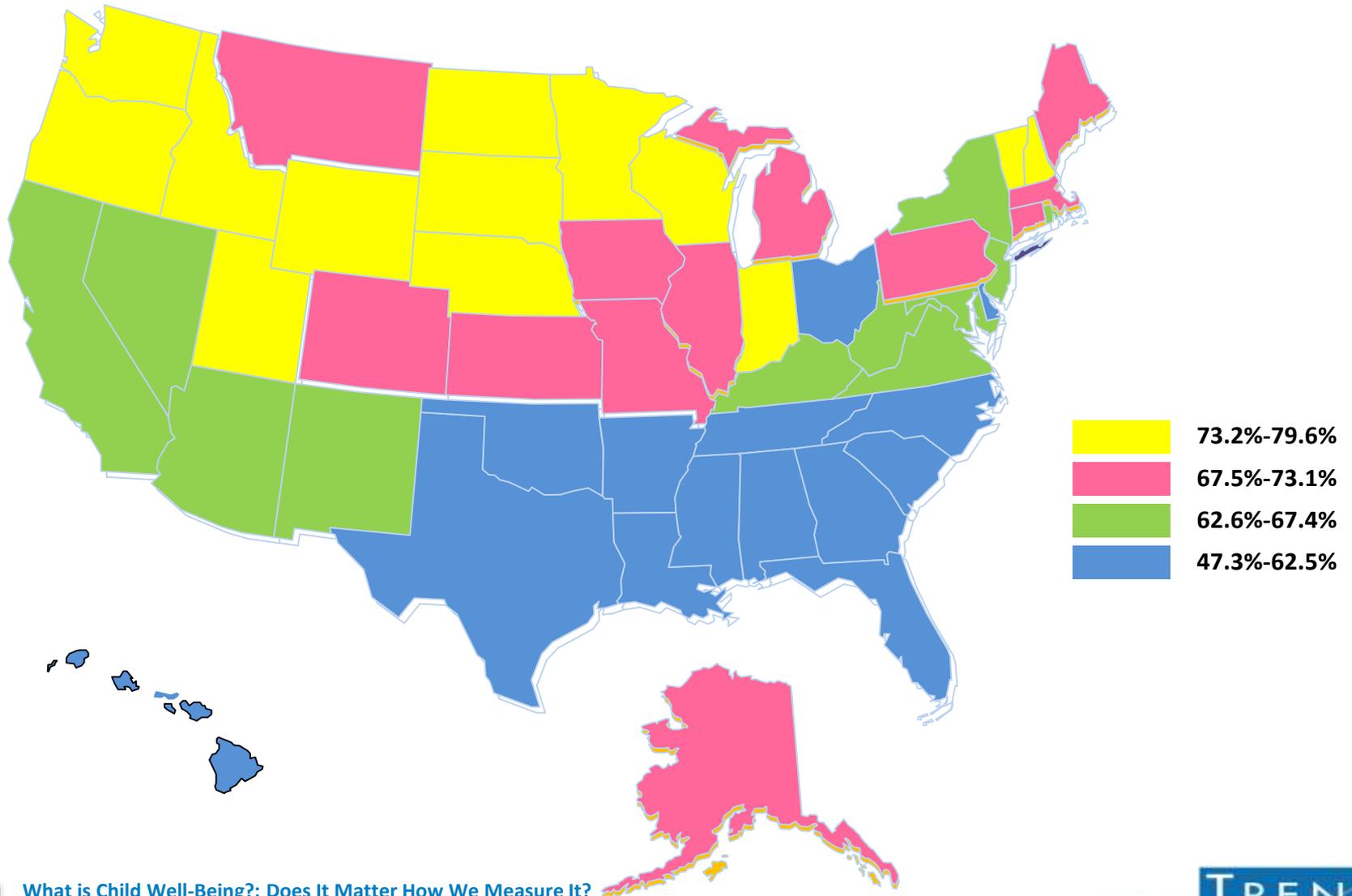
Whole Child Indices (4 Domains)

Physical Health, Development & Safety	58%
Psychological and Emotional Development	65%
Social Development & Behavior	67%
Cognitive Development & Educational Achievement	65%
<u>All</u> Child Well-Being Domains	31%

Child Well-Being for 6-11 Year Olds, by State – Psychological and Emotional Development



Child Well-Being for 6-11 Year Olds, by State – Cognitive Development and Educational Achievement



In sum...

7 Reasons We Need to Focus on the Positive:

1. The Declaration of Independence
2. Good science
3. Necessary to fully describe children and youth
4. Can be measured well
5. Public Perceptions
6. Kids' Perceptions
7. Community Perceptions

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- Complete and accurate measures are needed to inform policy makers and the public about trends
- To identify negative trends and target populations at risk
- To monitor progress
- To build the knowledge base
- To inform the public, policymakers, and the press about the status of children
 - Child well-being should be a leading indicator
 - Clear, accurate, and simple measures of child well-being